



Intermittent Fasting

What is Intermittent Fasting?

Intermittent fasting (also known as time restricted eating) involves alternating periods of fasting and eating, and there are a few different methods of doing this. You may have heard of the 5:2 or 16:8 diets, these are both based on intermittent fasting principles. Fasting allows the body to use stored energy through burning excess body fat.

How does it work?

When we eat, we take in more energy from food that can immediately be used by the body. Insulin is produced when we eat so it can break down carbohydrate into glucose and be used by the cells for energy, or it will be stored in the liver or muscle as glycogen. When we need a quick source of energy, glycogen is broken down to release glucose into the bloodstream.



However, there is limited storage space for glycogen and once that is reached, the liver will turn excess glucose into fat. Some of this will be stored in the liver, or it will be exported to other fat deposits in the body.

When in a fasted state, insulin levels fall which signals the body to start burning stored energy as

none is coming in through food. Blood glucose levels will fall so the body needs to use the stored glucose for energy. It will use the glycogen in the liver first as that is the most accessible. After this has depleted, the body will start to break down fat to get the energy it needs.



So, the body is either in two states – the fed or fasted state. Either we are increasing our stores of food energy, or we are decreasing the stores by burning through stored energy.

Different methods of fasting

There are a number of different ways to do intermittent fasting. Two of the most common methods are the 5:2 or 16:8 diets.



You will have 2 days where you have a very low calorie intake, usually the target is 500-600 kcals, and on the other 5 days you will follow normal healthy eating guidelines



You will fast for 16 hours of the day and only have an 8-hour period of the day where you follow healthy eating guidelines for your meals and snacks.

Intermittent fasting can help you lose body fat and inches as it works out to an approximately a 25% total calorie deficit for the week. However, you do need to be mindful of the foods you are eating in the fed state, if you overeat or are eating high calorie foods then you won't see the weight reduction you are looking for.

What can I eat?

On fasting days: Planning is essential to get the most out of your calorie limit. Your foods will be based around:



Fluids: You'll drink more fluids on fasting days to help alleviate some of the side effects you may experience. Aim for about 3 litres and this can include water, no-sugar squash, tea and coffee.



Protein: Will help you feel fuller so should be included where possible. Choose low calorie lean proteins such as chicken, turkey, fish, beans and pulses.



Vegetables: Are very low in calories and high in fibre so make sure you have them with every meal and for snacks. The fibre will help you to feel full and aid digestion.

For the days and times that you aren't fasting, you will want to keep your diet in line with general healthy eating guidelines which include:



Wholegrain foods: Such as oats, wholegrain bread, pasta and rice.



Fish: White fish such as haddock or cod & oily fish like salmon, mackerel and sardines.



Fruit & vegetables: Increase your vegetable intake with meals and snacks.



Lean meats: Choose meats such as skinless chicken, turkey and pork and beef with visible fats trimmed off.



Lentils, beans & pulses: An important source of lean protein, low in fat and high in fibre.



Dairy: Opt for low fat varieties such as skimmed milk and reduced fat yoghurt & cheese.

What food should I avoid?



Animal fats: Foods that contain animal fat such as butter, cheese, cream, dripping and lard.



Red & processed meats: These tend to contain more saturated fats and include foods such as beef, sausages & bacon.



Processed foods: These include cakes, pastries, fast food, pies and convenience foods.



Sugar: This includes simple sugars such as honey, table sugar and any foods containing added sugar such as sweets, chocolates, ice cream, biscuits.



Refined carbohydrates: This means any carbohydrates that have been highly processed and contains little of the original grain. This includes white flour, white bread, white rice, white pasta and many breakfast cereals.

Top tips

Preparation is key to any weight management regime. Here are some tips to think about:

- Add flavour to dishes by adding garlic, herbs, spices, lemon juice or balsamic vinegar.
- Look at different ways of cooking food to reduce the calories – steaming, poaching, baking or grilling are all healthy ways of cooking food.
- Bulk out your meals with beans, pulses and legumes (these can be tinned).
- Add lots of vegetables to meals, have side salads or eat veg as snacks – they are low in calories and will make you feel fuller.
- Other foods to snack on include olives, nuts, seeds and cheese.
- Try to include lean protein with every meal, this could be chicken, turkey, eggs or fish.
- Avoid alcohol as it contains a lot of calories and offers no nutritive value.
- Leave gaps between your fast days as you'll find them easier to manage.
- Making your meals from scratch is the best way to optimise your calories.
- Physical activity is still a really important component of weight management so try and incorporate it into your non-fasting days.

